FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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SERMON: Wisdom is the Prize
SERIES: Fatherly Wisdom
SCRIPTURES: Proverbs 1:20-33; 2-3
SPEAKERS: Brady Smith
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Credit to Daniel & Jon Akin, authors of Christ-Centered Expository on Proverbs

Good morning, Five Forks Church. How great and mighty is our God, amen?

Raise of hands, where are my Preschool, Primary, and Elementary School teachers at? Past or present, homeschool, private, or public school?

First of all, thank you for all you do guiding and teaching our children. That is NOT an easy task! But the reason I ask those who are teachers of younger children is because I'm curious if you are familiar with the children's book author **Julia Cook.**

She is a former school teacher and school counselor that had a passion for writing, so she decided to write some books that would help children learn valuable life lessons in fun, creative ways. Low and behold, her books took off, selling millions of copies and having written now over 100 different books.

One of the books Julia Cook has written is called, **What's in It for Me?**

It covers the life of a young boy named Noodle who is continually being told what to do.

Noodle, you need to go pull the weeds.
Noodle, you need to go make your bed.
Noodle, when you kick a soccer ball, you need to make sure you kick it this way.
Noodle, you need to put it effort at school and try to get an A.

Every time he is asked to do something, Noodle responds…

Seriously? What's in it for me?

A valid question for sure, one that I imagine all of you in education or those of you who are parents have probably heard before from your kids!

At the back of the book, Julia provides tips and tricks for parents and educators of how to address this question with kids. This is what she wrote…

It seems like all children have, "What's in it for me?" tattooed to their foreheads. We can't make our kids care about something just because we do. They need to understand the internal WHY behind the effort.

There is certainly wisdom in that, which is fitting considering our current sermon series.

Today is week 2 of our sermon series called **Fatherly Wisdom** where we are looking into the first 9 chapters of the book of Proverbs.

As King Solomon is writing and sharing his vast wisdom with the world, he spends the first 9 chapters specifically addressing his son, the crown prince. Knowing that one day Rehoboam will become king, Solomon wants to make sure he is well-equipped with the Wisdom of God so that he may live and lead well.

As we began dissecting Proverbs, we took a look at the first 7 verses of the book where Solomon answered the question, **"What is Wisdom?"**

For those who were not here, or perhaps if you just need a reminder of how we answered this question, this is what we said,

Biblical wisdom is about making the right choice based on the knowledge we receive from God's Word. We do this through…

Correction & Understanding
The Knowledge of Good and Evil
Discernment
Obtaining Guidance

This is our goal, what we are after, and it's after sharing what wisdom is at the start, Solomon then speaks directly to his son. Let's pick up now at Proverbs 1:8,

[8] My child, listen when your father corrects you. Don't neglect your mother's instruction. (Proverbs 1:8 NLT)

I like to envision it as if Solomon has little Rehoboam on his lap and tells him, "Son, you need to develop this kind of wisdom." Upon hearing this, little Rehoboam looks up at Solomon with a glint in his eye as if to say, "Of course, dear father, I will do whatever you say!" But then, something shifts and he suddenly shouts, **"Wait, seriously? What's in it for me?"**

Why should I want wisdom? What are the practical benefits? How will it truly help me in life?

I think we can all agree that those are certainly valid questions for anyone to ask.

Thankfully, as Solomon was blessed with God's wisdom, he would have seen these questions coming from a mile away. Why wisdom? Let me tell you, son…

Refusing to Accept Wisdom Will Wreck Your Life

On the other hand, **Accepting Wisdom Will Save Your Life**

Because **Wisdom is the Prize**

These are the answers that Solomon shares in the forthcoming chapters, so let's take some time to dive deeper into each of these answers as we discover why we need God's wisdom so desperately in our lives. Beginning with that first part…

I. Refusing to Accept God's Wisdom Will Wreck Your Life

When I was younger, around the age of 9 or 10 years old, I recall going to a Christian summer camp for a week. Much of what we learned throughout the week was some of the "fundamentals" of Christianity. God loves you, yet sin separates us from God. However, Jesus rescues and redeems us from our sin, so will you put your trust in him to be your savior?

Well during one of the final days of that camp, the speaker showed us a 7-minute-long video called **"A Letter from Hell".** The premise is that a young man named Josh passes away suddenly in a car accident, yet did not know who Jesus was.

He then sends a letter to his Christian friend, Zach, explaining the torment he is experiencing down in hell and asking why Zach never told him more about Jesus… If I'm being honest, it was pretty traumatizing as a young child watching this.

Hellfire and brimstone type of teaching and preaching can be harsh, and I will say, there are certainly wrong ways to do it. Many people have used the threat of hell as a way on manipulating others into making a rash decision they don't fully understand.

However, often times with this fiery type of teaching, I believe the intentions behind that kind of passion is because there is a passion for loving people and not wanting them to perish, such as that traumatic video I watched as a kid.

And sure, we could debate and talk about the most effective methods of evangelism all morning long, but what is not debatable is the fact that there is an urgent need to plead and share with those who are headed towards destruction. There is a need to find salvation in Jesus.

Now, the reason I bring this up is because here in the beginning of Proverbs, Solomon doesn't hold back when answering the, "What's in it for me?" question.

If you have your Bible or electronic device, make your way to Proverbs 1, starting at verse 20, and listen to what Solomon writes,

20 Wisdom shouts in the streets. She cries out in the public square. 21 She calls to the crowds along the main street, to those gathered in front of the city gate:

As Solomon begins making this plea to embrace wisdom, to embrace God himself, he presents it in a very unique way. Did you notice how Solomon is referring to "Wisdom" as a "she"?

"She cries out in the public square. 21 She calls to the crowds along the main street…"

As part of a literary technique to help get his son and us as readers to better understand God's wisdom, Solomon personifies it. Similar to how we may personify something like a car, "Yep, she's still running, even though she guzzles oil like crazy and she's got a bit of an issue starting up, she's still pushing along at 250,000 miles!"

Furthermore, in the Hebrew language, the word for wisdom is a feminine noun. Just like Spanish or French, Hebrew has gender identities for its nouns, so when creating a metaphor, it takes on that identity.

That's why the identity for God's wisdom, as Solomon teaches his son about God's wisdom in these first 9 chapters of Proverbs, has since become known as "**Lady Wisdom**". So, if you ever hear someone mention "Lady Wisdom" when talking about Scripture, they're really just talking about **the personification of God's Wisdom.**

Now the reason for Solomon creating this fictitious personification of wisdom is because the REAL personification of wisdom had yet to arrive on earth when Solomon was writing the Proverbs.

For who is God's Wisdom incarnate? That would be **the true person of Wisdom: Jesus.** Yes, the Son of Man, the one whom we can know, and the one whom we should pursue, above all else.

Just to recap this so we're all on the same page… God's Wisdom, personified through Lady Wisdom in the Old Testament, is ultimately revealed through Jesus in the Gospels of the New Testament.

With that understanding in mind, what is Lady Wisdom going to shout to everyone in the streets as told in verse 21? Well, it begins with…

A. Lady Wisdom's Invitation

Let's read this now, Proverbs 1:22-23,

[22] "How long, you simpletons, will you insist on being simpleminded? How long will you mockers relish your mocking? How long will you fools hate knowledge?

[23] Come and listen to my counsel. I'll share my heart with you and make you wise. (Proverbs 1:22-23 NLT)

Wow! Quite the fiery start from Lady Wisdom as she calls out to this crowd, and within this crowd she has 3 specific audiences she is trying to reach:

- **Simpletons – People who are young, gullible, and inexperienced.** People who do not possess wisdom simply because they never had the opportunity, or never took advantage of opportunities in the past.
- **Mockers – People who stubbornly reject the wisdom they've been told.** An example of someone like this would Pharoah from the story of Moses and the Exodus. Despite God continuously displaying His power to Pharoah and demanding His people be freed, Pharoah's heart was hardened, as he stubbornly rejected God.
- **Fools – The "In-between-ers" who sit between gullible and stubborn.** Like how I was as an angsty teenager, I was old enough to know some wisdom, yet too stubborn to follow through with it. However, I was still young and gullible enough that I had much to learn still.

Lady Wisdom is calling out to these groups, the people who are most in need of wisdom, and she invites them,

[23] Come and listen to my counsel. I'll share my heart with you and make you wise.

It's an invitation to be changed, an invitation to repent from their former ways so that they may become wise, an invitation to be in relationship with God and His Wisdom.

The question now is… What will happen if these groups reject this invitation? What's in it for me? Well, Lady Wisdom doesn't sugarcoat it…

B. Rejecting Wisdom's Invitation Leads to Pain

Listen to what she says to the group of simpletons, mockers, and fools…

[24] "I called you so often, but you wouldn't come. I reached out to you, but you paid no attention. [25] You ignored my advice and rejected the correction I offered. [26] So I will laugh when you are in trouble! I will mock you when disaster overtakes you—[27] when calamity overtakes you like a storm, when disaster engulfs you like a cyclone, and anguish and distress overwhelm you. [28] "When they cry for help, I will not answer. Though they anxiously search for me, they will not find me. [29] For they hated knowledge and chose not to fear the Lord.

[32] For simpletons turn away from me—to death. Fools are destroyed by their own complacency. (Proverbs 1:24-29, 32 NLT)

Again, wow… Fiery words here in Proverbs 1, but the point being made is a simple, yet harsh one.

As sinners, we all fail to live up to the standards of God's Wisdom, and for that failure there is judgment. That judgment is FIERCE!

Solomon describes the results of it being like that of a **calamity – a disastrous event that causes severe damage, deep distress, and widespread suffering.**

What Lady Wisdom is warning this group is that when you reject wisdom, when you reject God Himself, your worst nightmares will come true. Yes, those things that keep you awake at night as you try and strategize how you'll avoid them, those are the things that will happen to you if you reject wisdom.

Things like that hidden pornography addiction that you've been keeping from your spouse eventually getting discovered.
Things like the refusal to discipline your children, leading them down a path of entitlement, ultimately wrecking their lives.
Things like that gambling addiction that pushes you into such vicious debt, completely wrecking you and your family's future.

Lady Wisdom warns that you will reap what you sow, and that is something we must still be warned of today. Once final judgment is cast, that's it! There is no turning back. As Jesus said in Matthew 10,

[32] "Everyone who acknowledges me publicly here on earth, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. [33] But everyone who denies me here on earth, I will also deny before my Father in heaven." (Matthew 10:32-33 NLT)

That's why today must be the day of salvation, which is ultimately the message that Lady Wisdom is trying to share, and it's what I want each of you to understand…

Jesus does not want you to wait until your life is a calamity to turn it around. Sure, that can make for incredible testimony stories, but experiencing the calamity of rejecting Christ is NOT required! In fact, it's safe to say that rejecting Jesus is heavily discouraged! That is why…

Jesus wants you to repent and turn to Him today! Because He knows the ultimate calamity you are heading towards if you continually reject Him and the Wisdom of God… That calamity being hell. And Jesus wants to save you from that ruin.

That is why you must understand that…

II. Accepting God's Wisdom Will Save Your Life

After explaining the calamity and terrors that come from rejecting God and His wisdom, the closing verse of Proverbs 1 is Lady Wisdom explaining this,

[33] But all who listen to me will live in peace, untroubled by fear of harm." (Proverbs 1:33)

You see, in this world, we are often bombarded with a host of voices. People clamoring for your attention so that you'll hear and follow what they have to say. Whether it's a commercial ad, a teacher, social media post, friend, family member…

These human voices can have a wide range of intentions that they want from you. Some are godly messages, while some are full of evil. Some instruct or warn us, while others extort and manipulate us.

The question for you today is, **"Whose voice will you listen to?"**

One of my favorite movies as a child was the cartoon Disney movie called. the Emperor's New Groove. Throughout the movie the one character, Kronk, has multiple scenes where he is faced with a tough decision.

(Pic) In each of those moments, a little angel appears on his one shoulder, while a little devil appears on the other. They tell Kronk what he should do next, with the angel of course giving a more righteous answer. But then it's in Kronk's hands… Whose voice will he listen to?

Everyone… Whose voice will you listen to?

Author Jon Akin once said it like this, **"God warns us and instructs us to keep us from harming ourselves—not to keep us from having fun. He wants what is best for us, and He doesn't want us to hurt ourselves. Will you listen to His voice? Or will you listen to the voice of another because it seems to offer more happiness at the time? <u>The difference between the good life and the foolish life is the voice you heed.</u>"**

Brothers and sisters, we must…

A. Heed Wisdom's Voice

Listen to what Solomon writes to his son, now in the beginning of chapter 2,

My child, listen to what I say, and treasure my commands. [2] Tune your ears to wisdom, and concentrate on understanding. [3] Cry out for insight, and ask for understanding. [4] Search for them as you would for silver; seek them like hidden treasures. (Proverbs 2:1-4 NLT)

Solomon tells his son, go on a treasure hunt for wisdom, and I believe he calls us to do the same. We must seek God's Wisdom! We must seek Jesus, who is the ultimate display of God's Wisdom! And why? What's in it for me?

It's the fact that there is nothing more precious than Jesus. Nothing can satisfy you in the way that he does, and nothing can ever compare.

So listen, tune your ears to the Wisdom that God provides, follow the example of Jesus, and then Solomon explains,

[5] Then you will understand what it means to fear the Lord, and you will gain knowledge of God. [6] For the Lord grants wisdom! From his mouth come knowledge and understanding. [9] …you will understand what is right, just, and fair, and you will find the right way to go. [10] For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will fill you with joy. (Proverbs 2:5-6, 9-10 NLT)

If you heed wisdom's voice, then you will be become filled with understanding. You will understand what it means to fear God, fear in the way of having great reverence for who He is. You will understand what is right and wrong, just and unjust, fair and unfair. Wisdom is what helps bring us into right relationship with God.

I find it interesting the cycle **(Pic)** that Solomon lays out for us here in Proverbs 2. If you seek wisdom, then you will find God. When you find God, you will gain wisdom! Heed wisdom's voice. Because when you do…

[11] Wise choices will watch over you. Understanding will keep you safe. (Proverbs 2:11 NLT)

Keep you safe from what exactly? Well,

B. Wisdom Will Enable You to Resist Evil

Picking up at Proverbs 2, verse 12…

[12] Wisdom will save you from evil people, from those whose words are twisted. [13] These men turn from the right way to walk down dark paths. [14] They take pleasure in doing wrong, and they enjoy the twisted ways of evil. [15] Their actions are crooked, and their ways are wrong. (Proverbs 2:12-15 NLT)

Solomon provides warning against the evil voices of those who are corrupted by the world, those that are heading towards the path of calamity.

Like Satan in the Garden of Eden whose twisted words convinced Adam and Eve to first sin, “Oh, surely you won’t die! You eyes will just be opened!”

The twisted words of evil from our world create that same distortion.

Gambling commercials and advertisements are running rampant, “Look at how much fun this is! Become a thrillionaire!”

“Look at all the fun that excessive drinking can provide you! See how great it is getting wasted all the time!”

“Make sure you fool around with your boyfriend or girlfriend before marriage, because that will help you know what you like and don’t like!”

“It’s okay if you flirt with that coworker because your spouse isn’t giving you the attention you want at home.”

These words of the wicked will call sinful acts as “good”, rejoicing and encouraging it, and how often do we get sucked into the same trap? With our words we will justify, rationalize, and minimize our sin and the sins of others.

Yet as we discussed earlier, these **sinful traps will lead to calamity, pain, and brokenness.**

What then can save us, protect us, and prevent us from falling into these traps of sin? Wisdom.

[12] Wisdom will save you from evil people, from those whose words are twisted. (Proverbs 2:12 NLT)

God’s Wisdom will save your life. Because…

III. Wisdom is the Prize

Do you remember a moment in your life where you thought, “I NEED to own that!” When in reality, you didn’t really need it at all?

I remember back in elementary school we'd have the **"Scholastic Book Fair" (Pic)**, where they would handout a magazine with all kinds of interesting books and toys that you could order and buy.

I distinctly remember one year seeing the coolest thing that I just HAD to have… "See-in-the-dark" goggles. I NEEDED to have that, because how cool would it be to see in the dark?! I begged my parents for the money to purchase these goggles, and they graciously gifted me the money.

I turned in my money and the order form, and about 3 weeks later my see-in-the-dark goggles arrived… In great excitement I open up the package and what do I find? An incredibly bulky, uncomfortable set of goggles with two little flashlights sitting on top.

This treasure that I thought I wanted the most, NEEDED the most, turned out to be worthless. It's easy for us to get sucked into the treasures of this world, and so Solomon writes to his son about what the true, superior treasure is. And let me assure you, it was not see-in-the-dark goggles.

Just listen to what Solomon wrote here in Proverbs 3,

[13] Joyful is the person who finds wisdom, the one who gains understanding.
[14] For wisdom is more profitable than silver, and her wages are better than gold.
[15] Wisdom is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her. [16] She offers you long life in her right hand, and riches and honor in her left.
[17] She will guide you down delightful paths; all her ways are satisfying.
[18] Wisdom is a tree of life to those who embrace her; happy are those who hold her tightly. (Proverbs 3:13-18 NLT)

This brief poem found within chapter 3 is Solomon's clinching argument for why wisdom is the ultimate prize we should seek in life. His final answer to "What's in it for me?

As we went over earlier, Solomon created this fictitious character known as Lady Wisdom to personify and help us better understand God's wisdom, and he calls us to get her above anything else. Like the scene at the end of a romance movie where the guy rushes to the airport to "get the girl" before she takes off.

Solomon calls for us to chase after Wisdom, chase after Jesus, in such a manner.

To help motivate his son, and us, to pursue wisdom in such a way, Solomon explains the great joy that comes from God's Wisdom. At the start of the poem he said, **[13] Joyful is the person who finds wisdom…**

Then at the end he gives this beatitude by saying… **happy are those who hold her (wisdom) tightly.**

Abiding in God's wisdom and Jesus is what leads to this blessed, joyful, and happy life because it is pursuing to live as God intended!

That is why Solomon vehemently tells his son that the benefits of wisdom is far greater than that of silver, gold, and jewels.

Wisdom is better because it cannot be destroyed.
Wisdom is better because it shapes you into becoming the man or woman God called for you to be.

[14] For wisdom is more profitable than silver, and her wages are better than gold.
[15] Wisdom is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her. (Proverbs 3:14-15)

To paraphrase Old Testament scholar Bruce Waltke who dedicated much of his life to understanding the Proverbs…

Money can put food on the table, but not the fellowship around it.
Money can buy you a house, but it cannot produce the home.
Money can give woman jewelry, but it cannot buy her real love.

Wisdom is far better than that. Wisdom can provide us with genuine physical, relational, and spiritual blessing.

When we abide in the wisdom of God as Solomon teaches throughout this book of Proverbs, it creates happy homes, loving marriages, and the kinds of treasures that cannot be bought with money.

Riches will ultimately not make you happy, but Solomon explains that wisdom will. The reason for this is because wisdom is not a "thing". Wisdom is a person.

And as we said at the earlier on, **the true person of wisdom is Jesus.**

Brothers and sisters, we must chase after Jesus more than anything else in this world.

So often as lukewarm Christians we will say, "Well, for me to be joyful, I of course need Jesus, *but* I also need fill-in-the-blank".

I also need a promotion at work. I also need the right car. I also need financial security. I also need romance. I also need the perfect family photo for the Christmas card. I also need...

Whatever you put in that blank is really what you treasure the most if you're putting it in the same category as Jesus.

Solomon pleads with his son that if your heart is set on the things of this world as being the ultimate provider of joy in your life, you may lose those things and joy will elude you.

However, if you set your heart on Jesus. If Jesus is truly the supreme prize in your life, then true joy is achievable.

To once again read the conclusion of this little poem found in Proverbs 3, Solomon writes,

happy are those who hold her tightly. (Proverbs 3:18b NLT)

Happy are those who hold wisdom tightly. Happy are those who hold Jesus tightly. Because Jesus is the prize.

Let's pray.

Benediction:

As we close, allow me to read arguably the most famous words found in all of Proverbs. It's chapter 3, verses 5 and 6…

[5] Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. [6] Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

Let us trust in Him and His wisdom alone.

Have a great week.